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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that explored parents' views of education and their evaluations of their school's success are presented in this paper. The parents represented families involved in a Follow Through program, a federally sponsored education program that serves low-income children in kindergarten and the primary grades who had been enrolled in Head Start or similar preschool programs. The sample included three communities--one urban, multicultural Southwest (46% Hispanic, 47% Yaqui, Native American); one rural, Native American (a reservation in the southwest--the Tohono O'odham); and one rural, Appalachian (98% white). A 1990 survey of 812 parents yielded 195 responses (a 24 percent response rate) and a 1991 survey of 635 parents produced 226 usable returns (a 42 percent response rate). Interviews were also conducted with a total of 21 parents, most of whom were mothers. Reading received a unanimous and pervasive high ranking at all sites among all survey groups. Findings indicate that longterm parent participation in the program produced a sense of community cohesion and that the quality of school experiences may be improving for these families. The primary significance of these findings is the "voice" they have given each community's parent participants for input into educational decision-making. Sentiment in the non-English speaking community was very strong that interviews should be concluded in the families' home languages. Ten tables are included. (Contains 21 references.) (LMI)

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Parents' Perceptions of School's Success in Three Follow Through Communities: A Preliminary "Ethno"Evaluation

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Introduction

Educators in the 90's are rediscovering the benefits of parent involvement in their children's education. Researchers have documented the effect of parent involvement on student achievement (Henderson, 1987). Inquirers have reported some perceptions of teachers (Becker and Epstein, 1989), students (Epstein, 1982), and parents (Dauber and Epstein, 1989) on the importance of the parent involvement process. Delgado-Gaitan (1990) has recommended parent organization programs as "a means of empowering minorities." (Chilcott, 1992, p.35)

Yet, parents are rarely empowered and seldom involved in deliberate, formal ways in the evaluation of schools and the programs for their children. Researcher-evaluators of certain paradigmatic persuasions continue to make a travesty of directives to include parents' perceptions in evaluation processes. A prime example of this error is provided by an "in-depth" study of a currently federally sponsored educational program in which family participation is a major component. The evaluation contract for this study mandates inclusion of parents' perceptions of the program. External evaluators are superficially operationalizing this legislative directive in the form of one forty-five minute parent meeting at each "in-depth" study site. The preceding scenario is provided to illustrate the acute need for a critical review of the "...more democratic, culturally appropriate means of evaluating and incorporating parental input into their children's educational futures" (Schlessman-Frost quoted in Paul, 1992,p.17).

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The design of the paper presented here was an attempt to follow and promote "more democratic, culturally appropriate" evaluation.

Background of the Study

Follow Through is a federally sponsored compensatory education program that serves low-income children in kindergarten and primary grades who were previously enrolled in Head Start or similar preschool programs. Follow Through has four major program goals, one of which is to "achieve active parent participation in the development, conduct, and overall direction of services to these children."(Federal Register, 1992, p.)

The majority of Follow Through models include families' perceptions in program evaluation, even though federal regulations do not specify requirements for evaluation of the parent participation component of the program. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory has recently published a source book on Follow Through models, Follow Through: A Bridge to the Future.(1992) Each model submitted a one page program description for use in the publication. These program descriptions appear in an appendix to the book. One of the description categories is "Model Effectiveness," a section for sharing evaluation results.

Eight of the fifteen Follow Through sponsor generated descriptions report some evaluation in terms of parent outcomes or parents' perceptions of program effectiveness. It is encouraging that the majority of sponsors include, by choice, some evaluation of parent participation. Yet, it is troubling that an almost equal number did not include the families in their evaluation brief.

This trend of not including the families' perceptions is also evident in a series of publications of one Follow Through model's evaluations. (Robbins, 1986; Stallings & Krasavage, 1986; Stallings, Robbins, Presbrey, & Scott,

1986). Those evaluations include only one paragraph on "the community's perceptions of the schools." (Robbins, 1986)

In contrast to the lack of attention to community input, this Follow-Through evaluation was part of a deliberate effort to develop participatory evaluation methods. This type of evaluation is designed to feed back to communities - families and educators - rather than to continue to violate or undermine families' primary rights to the welfare of their children. Integrity must be maintained in data collection. The process and methods should not ignore considerations as to the implications for families from varying cultural backgrounds. "The advantage of this kind of evaluation is to help establish a kind of 'paradigm' in which the use of data collected empowers the primary participants" (Schlessman-Frost, 1991, p. 89).

The purposes of this paper are to present parent participants' views of what is important in education, their evaluations of school's success, and their perceptions of their own involvement in their children's education. These parents represent families involved in a Follow Through program implemented in three communities; one urban multicultural, one rural Native American, and one rural Appalachian.

In addition to the dissemination of this information to other researchers, perhaps this work will make a small contribution to the development of more democratic evaluation designs and methodologies.

The Survey

Methods

A parent survey was developed to establish an hierarchy of parent value perspectives on education, to elicit parent evaluations of school and the Follow Through program, and to gather descriptive data on the parents' perceptions on their

involvement in their children's education. The survey was available bilingually to the community literate in Spanish. Yaqui and Hispanic parents had the option of using their language of choice to complete the survey.

The instrument was piloted with parents at a parent workshop. The questionnaire was administered to parents in the three Follow Through communities and in the community of one comparison school.

Data

Responses from parents from three Follow Through communities and the one comparison community constituted the survey database. One community is an urban multicultural community in the Southwest. Most community members are Hispanic (46%) and Yaqui Native American (47%). The other community from the Southwest is a homogeneous, rural (reservation) the Tohono O'odham, Native American tribe. The third community with 98% whites is located in rural Appalachia.

The survey was administered during two program operation years, school years 1989-90 and 1990-91. Data are reported for both years to document consistency or show change. In the spring of 1990, 812 survey were distributed in the three Follow Through communities. 195 (24%) were returned. In 1991, 635 surveys were distributed and 266 (42%) returned.

Survey response rates are reported in Table 1. In the spring of 1990, 86% of the respondents were mothers, 7% fathers, 4% grandmothers and aunts, and three of the respondents were couples, "both parents." For surveys returned in 1991, 87% were mothers, 6% fathers, and 4% grandmothers and aunts. One "couple" acknowledged completing the survey together. Because there is such a low percentage of identified input from males, no analysis of gender differences in responses was attempted. In 1990, 20% of the respondents identified their family structure as single

parent homes, 71% two parent homes, and 5% "other" or "extended family." Respondents showed similar tendencies in 1991 with 14% self-identified single parent families, 70% two parent, and 5% other. It appears that some respondents chose not to provide that demographic data.

TABLE 1
Follow Through Community's Parent Surveys Distributed and Returned

	Distributed		Returned			
	Year		Year			
	'90	'91	'90		'91	
Follow Through community	N	N	N	%	N	%
Appalachian	368	300	102	(28%)	166	(55%)
Southwest multicultural	94	85	48	(51%)	52	(61%)
Southwest Native American	350	250	45	(13%)	48	(19%)

Note. This analysis followed the recommendation that Follow Through evaluation is more appropriate at a community level (House, et al, 1978). Further analysis is reported by community.

Comparative parent involvement and attitudinal research data were provided by the PTA/Dodge National Parent Survey (1991), a comparison school for the Appalachian community, and other published sources such as the Gallup poll(1992).

Results

Parental Value Hierarchies

A profile of respondents' educational priorities in each community are provided by the value hierarchies presented in Tables 2-7. In the 1990 survey, the only value question posed was "What kinds of education should involve the family?" Tables 2 , 3, and 4 report responses from each community.

In 1991, the question, "What kinds of education are important at school? Prioritize.", was added in hopes of providing more information to help clarify what parents thought was educationally important at home, and what was important at school. Tables 5, 6, and 7 report responses for each community.

TABLE 2

Appalachian Rural Parents' Value Hierarchy for Kinds of Education Which Should Involve the Family, in Rank Order.

Kind of education in rank order	Spring 1990 priority ranking chosen by parents								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Religion	37	10	5	2	7	8	3	7	
Values	32	28	6	4	2	3	4	1	
Reading	15	19	15	10	6	9	5	0	
Language	8	7	7	16	15	13	6	6	
Health	6	6	15	13	14	8	16	1	
Math	3	6	8	12	11	12	13	12	
Fitness	3	1	2	13	12	5	14	25	
Culture	2	2	13	5	5	15	12	21	

Kind of education in rank order	Spring 1991 priority ranking chosen by parents								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Religion	34	18	3	8	2	8	2	6	8
Values	33	28	7	4	5	4	3	4	2
Reading	22	10	13	10	11	8	7	2	2
Health	7	2	11	14	9	13	12	13	4
Math	6	8	8	10	11	9	11	16	6
Language	5	7	12	16	13	15	8	7	6
Fitness	5	4	7	7	9	6	12	16	18
Writing	4	8	9	10	11	10	15	9	10
Culture	4	4	18	5	10	8	9	5	21

Note. Numbers reflect **percentage** of parents responding.

TABLE 3

Southwest Urban Multicultural Parents' Value Hierarchy for Kinds of Education Which Should Involve the Family, in Rank Order.

Kind of education in rank order	Spring 1990 priority ranking chosen by parents								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Reading	31	13	10	10	8	0	2	0	
Values	23	15	4	10	0	8	6	2	
Language	19	17	23	8	2	2	2	0	
Culture	15	6	8	2	8	8	15	6	
Math	10	13	8	6	17	8	6	0	
Health	10	0	8	19	6	10	10	4	
Religion	6	4	2	2	10	6	8	21	
Fitness	4	0	0	1	8	17	6	25	

Kind of education in rank order	Spring 1991 priority ranking chosen by parents								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Reading	44	17	12	8	2	2	0	2	2
Language	25	14	10	25	6	0	4	2	2
Values	25	10	6	0	23	6	6	2	2
Math	19	15	10	17	6	14	2	0	4
Religion	15	2	2	0	2	10	15	8	23
Culture	14	12	4	6	14	2	2	15	12
Fitness	14	2	0	6	0	12	14	17	15
Health	10	6	4	4	6	8	14	12	17

Note. Numbers reflect **percentage** of parents responding.

TABLE 4

Southwest Rural Native American Parents' Value Hierarchy for Kinds of Education Which Should Involve the Family, in Rank Order.

Kind of education in rank order	Spring 1990 priority ranking chosen by parents								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Reading	31	29	11	7	7	7	2	0	
Values	31	20	11	4	7	4	4	4	
Language	16	11	16	16	11	11	4	2	
Health	11	2	11	13	22	11	16	2	
Culture	9	11	7	13	16	11	18	4	
Math	7	18	20	20	4	11	9	4	
Religion	4	4	9	4	9	18	2	33	
Fitness	2	0	2	9	11	7	24	29	

Kind of education in rank order	Spring 1991 priority ranking chosen by parents								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Reading	40	13	8	15	8	6	2	2	0
Culture	17	15	8	13	4	10	8	8	8
Values	17	15	2	2	13	15	15	8	2
Religion	8	2	4	4	17	8	4	8	25
Math	4	23	10	8	15	10	8	4	6
Language	4	13	23	23	10	6	4	0	4
Writing	4	10	25	15	8	6	8	10	0
Health	4	6	2	6	10	6	23	13	13
Fitness	2	2	6	6	2	13	4	23	21

Note. Numbers represent **percentage** of parents responding.

TABLE 5
Appalachian Rural Parents' Value Hierarchy for Education at School, in Rank Order.

Kind of education in rank order	Spring 1991 priority ranking chosen by parents								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Reading	52	25	10	4	4	1	1	0	0
Values	30	9	4	7	14	10	7	11	2
Religion	10	4	4	4	4	11	10	12	33
Writing	7	19	20	23	10	5	7	2	2
Math	8	22	25	16	11	5	4	3	1
Language	5	11	19	27	12	10	5	3	1
Health	5	3	2	9	25	21	13	11	4
Culture	1	2	3	2	6	16	15	22	22
Fitness	1	2	2	1	5	9	30	23	23

TABLE 6
Southwest Urban Multicultural Parents' Value H6erarchy for Education at School, in Rank Order.

Kind of education in rank order	Spring 1991 priority ranking chosen by parents								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Reading	40	17	12	6	2	2	0	2	0
Values	25	8	6	0	21	6	6	2	0
Language	21	15	10	25	6	0	4	0	0
Writing	21	13	19	4	10	6	2	4	0
Math	19	15	8	17	6	12	2	0	2
Culture	13	12	4	6	8	6	2	13	10
Religion	13	2	2	0	2	10	13	8	21
Fitness	13	2	0	4	0	12	13	17	12
Health	10	6	2	4	6	8	13	12	13

TABLE 7
Southwest Rural Native American Parents' Value Hierarchy for Education at School, in Rank Order.

Kind of education in rank order	Spring 1991 priority ranking chosen by parents								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Reading	56	27	4	8	2	0	0	0	2
Math	25	23	25	10	8	2	2	0	0
Language	23	19	6	27	15	2	0	0	2
Values	23	4	2	10	27	15	6	4	0
Writing	17	17	33	8	8	8	0	0	4
Fitness	17	0	0	2	8	15	19	23	8
Religion	15	2	0	2	2	6	19	17	19
Health	13	4	2	8	6	13	21	10	15
Culture	8	13	4	4	2	15	6	19	15

Note. Numbers represent percentage of parents responding.

Families' perceptions of school success

Parents' perceptions of the successes of the schools, teachers, and Follow Through program provide distinct insights into school-home relationships in each community and are reported in the next set of tables.

TABLE 8
Follow Through Families' Grades for the School by Community and Total Program, Reported by Percentages

	School year 1989-90				
Group surveyed	Grade given				
	A	B	C	D	F
Appalachian	46%	35%	15%	1%	0%
Multicultural	75%	13%	8%	0%	0%
Native American	20%	42%	31%	4%	2%
Total	44%	33%	18%	1%	1%

	School year 1990-91				
Group surveyed	Grade given				
	A	B	C	D	F
Appalachian	58%	25%	10%	1%	0%
Multicultural	60%	21%	14%	2%	0%
Native American	35%	25%	31%	4%	0%
Total	42%	32%	20%	3%	0%

Table 9
Follow Through Families' Grades for the Teacher, by Community and Total Program

School year 1989-90					
Group surveyed	Grade given				
	A	B	C	D	F
Appalachian	not included on survey at request of teachers				
Multicultural	77%	17%	4%	0%	0%
Native American	51%	29%	20%	0%	0%
Total	72%	19%	9%	0%	0%

School year 1990-91					
Group surveyed	Grade given				
	A	B	C	D	F
Appalachian	92%	5%	1%	0%	0%
Multicultural	67%	25%	1%	0%	0%
Native American	44%	21%	19%	4%	0%
Total	73%	17%	6%	1%	0%

The survey data collected for effectiveness of the Follow Through program did not produce responses which discriminate among the three participating communities and the comparison school.

Parents perceptions of their involvement in their children's education

Questions which parallel those reported in other published parent involvement research were included in the survey. Table 10 presents comparative data of parent responses to questions about selected parent involvement activities.

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TABLE 10
Parent Responses to Questions About Their Involvement in Educational Activities By Site, For Total Program, and Some Comparative Data

Educational activity question			
Do you read to or with your child(ren)?			
School year			
1989-90			
Group	Frequency of activity		
	every day	2-3 times/week	at least once/week
Appalachian	29%	38%	90%
Multicultural	29%	40%	92%
Native American	16%	44%	96%
Total FT	26%	40%	91%
PTA/Dodge survey	42%		82%
Comparison school	10%	36%	94%
School year			
1990-91			
Group	Frequency of activity		
	every day	2-3 times/week	at least once/week
Appalachian	29%	38%	90%
Multicultural	35%	33%	96%
Native American	21%	52%	87%
Total FT	35%		96%
Comparison school	12%	33%	94%

TABLE 10 (Continued)

Educational activity question

Do you help your child(ren) with homework?

School year

1989-90

Group	Frequency of activity		
	every day	2-3 times/week	at least once/week
Appalachian	44%	33%	90%
Multicultural	33%	38%	92%
Native American	31%	27%	91%
Total FT	38%	33%	88%
PTA/Dodge survey	42%		82%
Comparison school	7%	22%	96%

School year

1990-91

Group	Frequency of activity		
	every day	2-3 times/week	at least once/week
Appalachian	53%	28%	95%
Multicultural	35%	33%	92%
Native American	48%	33%	91%
Total FT	40%	30%	93%
Comparison school	5%	28%	92%

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TABLE 10 (Continued)

Educational activity question

Do you help your child(ren) with math?

School year

1989-90

Group	Frequency of activity		
	every day	2-3 times/week	at least once/week
Appalachian	25%	33%	89%
Multicultural	29%	44%	87%
Native American	27%	24%	93%
Total FT	26%	36%	87%
PTA/Dodge survey	not reported		
Comparison school	17%	38%	96%

School year

1990-91

Group	Frequency of activity		
	every day	2-3 times/week	at least once/week
Appalachian	28%	36%	86%
Multicultural	35%	37%	92%
Native American	25%	35%	87%
Total FT	26%	36%	88%
Comparison school	16%	32%	81%

Discussion

Parental Value Hierarchies for Education

In 1990 and 1991 questionnaires, the Appalachian parents ranked religion, values, and reading as their top three educational priorities for the types of education in which the family should be involved. This parallel ranking of value priorities over a two year period demonstrates stability in community values. Fitness, health, and math were not seen as critical issues for family involvement.

Reading, values, and religion also appeared as the top three educational priorities in response to the 1991 question about what is important at school. The appearance of the same three items reinforces the importance of these values for the community. It is interesting that reading is ranked first in the sequence for the school. The relatively low rankings of writing, math, and language for importance at school poses an interesting question for subsequent inquiry.

In the urban multicultural community, parents' responses for both 1990 and 1991 regarding family involvement in education placed their highest priority on reading. Values and language were consistently placed in the next ranking order.

Those families' priorities for school ranked reading highest. Values appeared as the next priority, followed by more traditional academic subjects: language, writing, math, and culture.

Families make a consistent choice for reading, religion, and values across the three questions on the two surveys. It appears that this cohesive community places value on language with its link to cultural identify.

Reading and values were the most frequently selected priorities of the rural Native American parents who participated in the 1990 survey. The percentage of parents who ranked reading as the highest priority for family

involvement in education even increased in 1991. Culture and values shared the next highest priority.

Over three-fourths of the parents responding to the survey gave reading first or second priority for education at school. It is interesting that the top three items in this value hierarchy are reading, math, and language. This is the one community directive approximating the Three R's. But even here, the importance of values was still strongly ranked.

Families' perceptions of school success

Results from this evaluation confirm other empirical findings that an organized parent involvement component helps establish positive community perceptions of the school and teachers (Epstein and Becker, 1982). Follow Through survey respondents have a more favorable attitude toward the school than the "B" average reported for elementary schools in Goodlad's A Place Called School.(198?) Follow Through families' attitudes are also stronger than the "general public" opinion reported by the Gallup Poll. Ratings given the local public school grade in 1990 were 8% "A" and 33% "B" and in 1991, 10% "A" and 32% "B" (Elam, Rose, and Gallup, 1991). 44% of the Follow Through parents gave their school an "A" in 1990, and 42% "A" in 1991.

The poverty level families with early elementary age children, often from non-majority ethnic groups, did not report daily educational activities at home such as reading and doing homework as frequently as the parents in the PTA/Dodge National Parent Survey (PTA, 1991). Large percentages of the Follow Through survey respondents reported frequent, "every day" or "two to three times a week," reading, homework, and math activities. More Follow Through parents reported weekly reading and homework with their children than respondents to the national survey. Demographics on the PTA/Dodge survey reported those

respondents were 86% white with a mean income of $33,800. The PTA/Dodge survey was conducted by telephone. Twenty families in the urban, multicultural Follow Through community alone cannot afford a telephone.

The comparison school data provided by a carefully matched Appalachian community in terms of isolation and socioeconomic status provides interesting insight into the impact of an organized parent involvement program on the families in such a community. It is tempting to suggest that Follow Through has helped those families read and do homework and math more frequently together.

The Interviews

Rationale

Survey research has many limitations. Surveys only produce responses presented by or anticipated by the designer(s). Such bias would be the most serious drawback posed by the exclusive use of surveys to the ethnomethodological intent of this evaluation.

In an attempt to provide some collateral evidence for parent perceptions collected by surveys, structured ethnographic interviews were also conducted in each community. Inclusion of this ethnomethodological technique helps achieve the intent of representing the participating parents' viewpoints as contributors to a democratic educational process.

Design

An evaluation specialist credentialled in anthropology worked with two consultants, one Native American and the other with extensive experience in the Southwest's multiple cultures, designed a structured, ethnographic interview.

(Spradley, 1979) Open-ended questions were posed to elicit parents' perceptions of community or cultural values, the place of school within the cultural hierarchy, and specific evaluation of the Follow Through program. The design process was carefully documented by a protocol as suggested by Yin. (1984)

Method

The interview was piloted by the consultants with a Native American informant. The evaluation field specialist trained Follow Through staff at each site and provided copies of the interview protocol. Each community was encouraged to interview at least one man, if possible. Most survey respondents were female (86%). Also, the father's or male in the household's role is little understood in these poverty cultures, especially the changing Native American cultures.

Interviews were tape recorded. English interviews were transcribed in the Model Sponsor office. Spanish interviews were transcribed by a native speaker translator. Tohono O'odham interviews were translated by a literate native speaker and then typed from a manuscript at the Model Sponsor office.

Data

Nine interviews were conducted at the school in the urban, multicultural community. Seven interviews were in Spanish, two in English. All informants were mothers except for one pair of Yaqui grandparents. Five interviews including four with mothers and one with a father were conducted in the rural Appalachian community. Five Tohono O'odham mothers were interviewed in their native language.

Results

Appalachian parents' perceptions

Results of the structured interview with the Appalachian parents indicated overwhelmingly positive reaction to the Follow Through program. Parents were uniformly enthusiastic about the program's effectiveness in sponsoring community values, motivation for both parents and children, and the successes the program produced with the children's education. It is no wonder that the parents' perceptions of other schools suffered in comparison. One mother's response was "I wish it were me going now."

Interview responses reinforced the parents' value hierarchy choices collected through the survey. Some reference to the importance of the children's moral and character development emerged in each interview. Parents indicated they felt primary responsibility for this facet of their children's growth. "(School) comes after church and God and religion and all that," said one mother. A father talked about his importance as a role model and emphasized that he wanted his daughters to be intelligent, "but without the moral values, education would be nothing."

Parents talked about specific ways they contributed to their children's education and/or worked with or at the school.

Tohono O'odham parents' perceptions

Structured interview results indicate these mothers' ongoing concern that parents and community members be used as resources. "The Tohono O'odham Nation needs to be a part of this (schools)." The typical response of these parents was that school was "scary" for them, but that the Follow Through program has increased their children's chances "to learn and get a good education." According to one mother, "Now school is different and I wish the years could roll back and I think

I would really enjoy it now. It's just so open with still the main subjects but more beyond that."

When asked how families and school can work together, another parent suggested that "... we become one big family and help each other out, not become enemies or form groups. Also that messages are set straight." The evidence indicates the importance of cultural impact among this group as it threads education with individual identity within language, family, and community.

Perceptions from the urban, multicultural (Hispanic and Yaqui) community

To a person, the responses collected from these parents indicated an enthusiastic willingness to work with their children at home, if only as resources. The Follow Through program was consistently praised. When asked about the programs, one parent said, "... they are very good and I hope they never take them away." Parents feel well treated at the school, and "the children do not want to go anywhere else." One parent was in the Follow Through program twenty years ago. She was eager to report that it is helping her children as much as it helped her. When asked if the Follow Through program helped with self esteem, one young mother responded simply," I have my house full of awards already....I am proud because they do feel encouraged."

Requests to the parents for information on the value of education to their children were answered in the framework of learning English in the schools. These parents seemed to be acutely aware of the importance of bilingualism.

One parent interviewed was a member of the Follow Through policy board. She felt, "very close to everyone, to the family [school faculty]. I felt a lot of pride because my children were here, and knowing everyone around here well, I felt like this was my family."

Limitations of the Interviews

Careful attention was given in the design to construct open-ended questions to avoid imposing the majority culture or evaluators' views on the direction of parents' responses. Despite these best laid plans for objectivity, most parents talked about their child's future or their hopes for their child's future in terms of education. It seems that having interviews conducted by people associated with the school generated education oriented responses.

Discussion

Several trends emerge from analysis of the survey and interview data when interpreted both individually and collectively.

A striking trend is that reading received unanimous and pervasive high ranking at all sites with all groups in the survey responses. Parents value reading as an educational activity which should involve the family and as a primary goal for the schools. Follow Through parents report reading with their children as an activity shared within the family. The communities including many families with home languages other than English read as frequently as the other Follow Through families surveyed in this study. Although these low socioeconomic families do not report daily reading as often as middle class white parents, a higher percentage report reading as a shared family activity than was shown in the PTA Dodge national survey.

The sense of community fostered by a Follow Through program should not be underestimated. The Follow Through schools and teachers received strong support from the community as evidenced by the grades given. All interview informants expressed some loyalty to the program and a sense of belonging to the school community. It seems that Follow Through programs embrace newly arrived parents. Responses

from the structured interviews suggest that long term parent participation in a Follow Through produces a sense of community cohesion. A desire for such was expressed by one of the Tohono O'odham parents participating in a relatively newly organized program. An interview with a parent in the over twenty year old multicultural community indicated that such a sense of unity exists.

The interviews provide a longitudinal perspective not available in outcome evaluations usually conducted in conjunction with a federal funding cycle. Parents' perspectives indicate that the quality of school experiences may be improving for these families.

Comparison of these groups based on this evaluation study is tempting. The intent of this evaluation, however, is not to set these communities in competition with one another nor to impose external values on each community culture. The purpose of this study is to provide insight into each community, to help other researchers or educators working with these or similar populations, and to validate parents' own perceptions with dignity equal to that of the evaluation data produced by standardized instruments.

Along a similar line, it is important to remember not overgeneralize the rural Tohono O'odham responses to other Native Americans. Analysis of the responses at the multicultural, urban school showed that the Yaqui families' supportive of the school and the teachers was even stronger than the overall program average (Schlessman-Frost, 1990).

It is tempting to overreach interpretations on collected information, but descriptive data, especially the ethnographic interviews, preclude generalizations.

Concluding Comments

Appropriate to the theoretical rationale for this evaluation, the primary significance of these findings is the

"voice" it has given each community's parent participants for input into educational decision-making. Sentiment in the non-English speaking communities was very strong that interviews should be conducted in the families' home languages. This encouraged the evaluator to recommend for educational evaluation in a pluralistic democracy the policy of allowing participants to use their language of choice. (Schlessman-Frost, 1991)

In addition, these findings should be of interest to other educators working with similar ethnic and socioeconomic level groups.

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